

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

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TO USDEL TAIF IMMEDIATE
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AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
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AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN PRIORITY
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY
USMISSION SINAI
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USDEL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 5856

LIMDIS

USDEL TAIF FOR THE SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, US, IS
SUBJECT: ISRAEL AND U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS ON THE EVE OF THE
SECRETARY'S VISIT

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE SECRETARY WILL FIND ON HIS ARRIVAL
IN ISRAEL A GENERALLY COHESIVE GOVERNMENT AND A PUBLIC
OPINION LARGELY SUPPORTIVE OF THAT GOVERNMENT. AFTER
HIS SUCCESSFUL TRIP TO WASHINGTON, BEGIN IS IN A SOLID
POSITION AND IS SUPPORTED, ACCORDING TO THE MOST
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RECENT POLL, BY 61 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE. THERE
IS SOME UNDERSTANDABLE APPREHENSION IN THE COUNTRY
REGARDING THE VISIT, AND REGARDING NEGOTIATIONS IN
GENERAL, BASED ON A GROWING AWARENESS THAT ISRAEL'S
DIFFERENCES WITH THE UNITED STATES (AND WITH THE
ARABS) MUST INEVITABLY BE FACED. END SUMMARY.

1. AFTERMATH OF BEGIN'S WASHINGTON VISIT. THE PRIME MINISTER IS IN A STRONG LEADERSHIP POSITION, FOLLOWING HIS VISIT TO WASHINGTON WHICH WAS GENERALLY ACCEPTED BY THE ISRAELI PUBLIC AS SUCCESSFUL. A RECENT POLL INDICATES THAT 61 PERCENT OF THE RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THAT BEGIN IS DOING A GOOD JOB AS PRIME MINISTER-- A HIGHER PERCENTAGE THAN USUALLY ENJOYED BY ISRAELI PRIME MINISTERS (SEPTTEL). HIS WASHINGTON VISIT GAVE HIM THE LEGITIMACY AND ACCEPTANCE HE CRAVED; NOT ONLY IN ISRAEL BUT IN MANY OTHER COUNTRIES IT WAS SEEN AS PUTTING THE SEAL OF APPROVAL ON HIM AS A LEADER IF NOT YET AS A STATESMAN. NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE SOME MURMURS OF DISCONTENT; FOR EXAMPLE, CRITICISM OF BEGIN'S HANDLING THIS PAST WEEK OF THE QUESTION OF A PARADE IN JERUSALEM NEXT YEAR ON ISRAEL'S INDEPENDENCE DAY. BEGIN REMAINS FIRMLY IN CONTROL; IN FACT; DURING THE KNESSET DEBATE ON THE PARADE HE WAS AT HIS WITTY AND CAUSTIC BEST.

2. THE RECENT BREAKDOWN IN NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE LIKUD AND THE DMC REGARDING THE LATTER'S PARTICIPATION IN THE GOVERNMENT COALITION ILLUSTRATES THE PRIMEMINISTERS'S STRONG POSITION. HE CLEARLY LED THE DMC THROUGH A LABYRINTH OF DISCUSSIONS AND NEGOTIATIONS AND THEN FIRMLY REJECTED THE REQUIREMENTS THE DMC FELT HAD TO BE SATISFIED
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BEFORE IT COULD HONORABLY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE COALITION. WHATEVER ELSE THE NEGOTIATIONS MAY MEAN, THEY ILLUSTRATE HIS BELIEF THAT HE DOES NOT NEED THE DMC FOR HIS COALITION. (IT PROBABLY ALSO ILLUSTRATES THAT HE FEELS HE CAN TURN TO THEM AT ANY TIME AND GAIN THEIR SUPPORT IN THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD HE NEED THEM.) HOWEVER, THERE ARE THOSE WHO BELIEVE BEGIN DOES GENUINELY DESIRE THE DMC'S PARTICIPATION; THAT HE WOULD FEEL BETTER HAVING IT IN THE COALITION TO HEAD OFF TROUBLES HE ANTICIPATES AHEAD ON RELIGIOUS ISSUES. THIS ARGUMENT RESTS ON A PERCEPTION THAT, STRONG AS HE IS, BEGIN IS NOT FREE TO RIDE ROUGHSHOD OVER THE OBJECTIONS OF HIS COALITION PARTNERS ON SUCH ISSUES AS ELECTORAL REFORM (DEAR TO THE DMC) AND DIVISION OF CABINET PORTFOLIOS (DEAR TO EVERYBODY).

3. THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO LEGITIMIZE THE THREE WEST BANK SETTLEMENTS TWO WEEKS AGO ALSO ILLUSTRATES BEGIN'S STRONG POSITION. HIS WILLINGNESS TO TAKE A DECISION ONE DAY AFTER HIS RETURN FROM WASHINGTON WHICH HE KNEW (OR SHOULD HAVE KNOWN) WOULD BE

VIEWS BY WASHINGTON WITH DISFAVOR IS TAKEN BY ISRAELI
CITIZENS TO INDICATE THAT HE CONSIDERS HIMSELF TO BE
IN A STRONG INTERNAL POSITION. WHETHER THEY BELIEVE
THE DECISION ITSELF WAS RIGHT OR WRONG, WISE OR
UNWISE, THEY THINK IT WAS TAKEN BY A PRIME MINISTER
WHO FEELS HE CLEARLY IS IN CHARGE AND HAS THE COURAGE
OF HIS CONVICTIONS.

4. EXPECTATIONS. AS ISRAEL LOOKS TO THE SECRETARY'S
VISIT AND FURTHER AHEAD TO THE RESUMPTION OF
NEGOTIATIONS AT GENEVA, THERE ARE MIXED VIEWS
REGARDING WHAT CAN BE ANTICIPATED. GENERALLY SPEAKING,
ISRAELIS REMAIN PESSIMISTIC REGARDING THE CHANCES OF
ACHIEVING A FULL PEACE AT GENEVA. A GOOD MANY ARE
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CONVINCED THAT THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE TO A COLLAPSE
OF THE EFFORTS TOWARD A SETTLEMENT IS MORE INTERIM
AGREEMENTS. NEVERTHELESS, ALL FEEL THAT A GOOD FAITH
EFFORT MUST BE MADE. THEY HAVE BECOME SOMEWHAT
APPREHENSIVE ABOUT THE VISIT IN RECENT DAYS AS THEY
HAVE READ DISCOURAGING PRESS ACCOUNTS FROM THE
SEVERAL ARAB CAPITALS, PARTLY BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE
THE WARMTH AND CORDIALITY DURING BEGIN'S WASHINGTON
VISIT WERE NOT REAL REFLECTIONS OF THE CURRENT STATE
OF ISRAELI/U.S. RELATIONS. THERE IS A GENERAL
FEELING OF WAITING FOR THE OTHER SHOE TO DROP,
ALONG WITH THE REALIZATION THAT WHILE THE WASHINGTON

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 5856

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VISIT MAY HAVE BEEN A SUCCESS-ESPECIALLY FOR BEGIN,
THE MAN--THERE STILL ARE REAL PROBLEMS TO BE FACED.

5. THERE IS ALSO A SENSE THAT TIME IS RUNNING OUT
AND THAT DIFFICULT DECISIONS ARE IMPENDING.
DIFFERENCES MUST BE FACED, BOTH WITH THE ARABS AN
WITH THE U.S. HERE THE DECISION, WHICH THE PRIME
MINISTER ANNOUNCED IN WASHINGTON, NOT TO SEEK PRIOR
COORDINATION OF U.S./ISRAEL POSITIONS BEFORE GENEVA
IS SEEN AS ONLY POSTPONING THE INEVITABLE CONFLICT
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WITH WASHINGTON. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT IS ALSO SEEN
AS A REFLECTION OF THE VERY REAL POSSIBILITY THAT
COORDINATION IS NOT POSSIBLE BECAUSE THE GAP
BETWEEN THE POSITIONS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES IS SO
WIDE.

6. THE EBAN VISIT. THE CURRENT TOUR OF THE UNITED
STATES BY FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER ABBA EBAN IS
REGARDED BY MOST ISRAELIS AS A NON-PARTISAN ATTEMPT
BY A RESPECTED AND INTERNATIONALLY ACCEPTED
SPOKESMAN TO EXPLAIN ISRAEL'S VIEWS AND TO CLOSE
THE GAP BETWEEN U.S. AND ISRAELI VIEWS TO THE EXTENT
POSSIBLE. EBAN IS SEEN AS CONVEYING THE NATIONAL
CONSENSUS ON THE TERRITORIES ISSUE; TO THE EXTENT
THIS CONSENSUS COINCIDES WITH THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT'S
POSITION, IT BLURS THAT GOVERNMENT'S IMAGE AS
EXTREMIST ON ARAB-ISRAELI ISSUES. EBAN IS IDENTIFIED
WITH FORMER LABOR GOVERNMENTS AND HIS MISSION GIVES
A MEASURE OF CONTINUITY WITH THE PAST TO BEGIN'S POLICIES.
IT ALSO REFLECTS A CONTINUING, SOMEWHAT NAIVE BELIEF
THAT WHEN ISRAEL'S POSITIONS ARE CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD,

U.S. SUPPORT SURELY WILL FOLLOW. THE EBAN TRIP SHOWS THE CONSISTENCY ON THIS POINT SHARED BY THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT WITH PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS--THAT A BETTER FOREIGN INFORMATION EFFORT IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF ISRAEL'S FOREIGN POLICY. IT WILL BE RECALLED THAT AN IMPORTANT THEME OF RABIN'S CAMPAIGN WAS THAT HE SHOULD BE GIVEN SPECIAL CREDIT FOR HIS ABILITY TO EXPLAIN ISRAEL'S POSITIONS ABROAD, AND PARTICULARLY IN THE U.S. IT ALSO REFLECTS, HOWEVER, ONE OF THE CRITICISMS OF THE RABIN GOVERNMENT BY BEGIN: THAT RABIN HAD BEEN DEFENSIVE AND NEGATIVE IN PORTRAYING TO OTHER COUNTRIES, AND PARTICULARLY TO THE U.S.,
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ISRAEL'S VIEWS AND POLICIES--THAT HE ONLY REACTED TO THE PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN OF THE ARABS.

8. RABIN IN OPPOSITION. FORMER PRIME MINISTER RABIN RESPONDS IN INTERVIEWS, ARTICLES, AND KNESSET APPEARANCES AND IS GENERALLY CRITICAL, AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED, OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. PARADOXICALLY, HE APPEARS TO BE SOMEWHAT MORE RESPECTED AS AN OPPOSITION LEADER THAN HE WAS AS A GOVERNMENT LEADER. HE HAS MADE IT PLAIN THAT HE IS SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE RESULTS OF CURRENT U.S. EFFORTS TO RECONVENE GENEVA AND TO PRESS FOR AN OVERALL NEGOTIATION. TO HIM, A RETURN TO INTERIM AGREEMENTS REPRESENTS THE ONLY REALISTIC POSSIBILITY FOR PROGRESS TOWARD NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL'S NEIGHBORS, AND IN THIS HE FINDS SUPPORT. HANNA ZEMER, FOR EXAMPLE, WROTE IN DAVAR ON AUGUST 5 THAT INTERIM AGREEMENTS SHOULD NOT BE EXCLUDED FROM ISRAEL'S PLANNING, NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE GOOD BUT BECAUSE THEY ARE LESS BAD THAN THE ALTERNATIVES OF NO AGREEMENT AT ALL, WAR, OR CONFRONTATION WITH THE U.S. AVRAHAM SCHWEITZER ECHOED THIS VIEW IN HAARETZ AND PREDICTED THAT THE U.S. WOULD RETURN TO INTERIM AGREEMENTS BECAUSE THESE ARE REALISTICALLY ATTAINABLE.

9. WHAT CAN THE SECRETARY EXPECT TO HEAR? THE ISRAELIS HAVE NOT BEEN SURPRISED AT WHAT THEY PERCEIVE TO BE THE DIFFICULTIES THE SECRETARY HAS ENCOUNTERED ON HIS TRIP, IN PARTICULAR ABOUT REPORTS THAT SADAT AND ASSAD CANNOT AGREE EVEN ON THE PROPOSAL TO HOLD DISCUSSIONS AT THE FOREIGN MINISTERS LEVEL. THEY WILL LIKELY POINT OUT THAT IT IS NOT ISRAEL WHICH IS HOLDING UP PROGRESS AND ASK "WHY BLAME ISRAEL? WHY PUT PRESSURE ON US? WE HAVE SAID EVERYTHING IS NEGOTIABLE."

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10. ALL ISRAELI GOVERNMENTS TEND TO SEE THE WORLD THROUGH THEIR OWN PRISM, WHICH IS UNDERSTANDABLE. HOWEVER, THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT--WITH SHARON, WEIZMAN, AND BEGIN HIMSELF--IS MORE NATIONALISTIC AND MORE LIMITED IN OUTLOOK AND EXPERIENCE THAN THE RABIN GOVERNMENT. IT IS LESS UNDERSTANDING OF THE UNITED STATES, AND OF THE WORLD IN GENERAL, AND VIEWS ISRAEL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ARAB WORLD FROM A NARROWER PERSPECTIVE. FOR EXAMPLE, THIS GOVERNMENT WILL ARGUE THAT THE INTERCEPTION OF A BAND OF TERRORISTS LAST WEEK IN GALILEE SHOWS AGAIN THE CORRECTNESS OF THE POSITION THAT THE PLO CANNOT BE A PART OF ANY NEGOTIATIONS.

11. IN SUM, THE COUNTRY HAS A CERTAIN SENSE OF RESIGNATION AND INEVITABILITY AS IT FACES THE SECRETARY'S VISIT AND POSSIBLE GENEVA NEGOTIATIONS. FEW EXPECT SUCCESS. HOWEVER, MANY ARE INTRIGUED BY BEGIN'S PROJECTION OF CONFIDENCE AS HE LOOKS TOWARD GENEVA AND EVEN HOPEFUL THAT HIS NEW DIRECTION MAY AT LEAST PUT THE ONUS OF FAILURE ON THE ARABS--WHERE TO ALL ISRAELI EYES IT RIGHTFULLY BELONGS.
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